

VZCZCXRO7706
PP RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHDBU #0789/01 1180829
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P R 280829Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7357
INFO RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 8574
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1505
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1514
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1560
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1581
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1563
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1336
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1591
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 0907
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1551
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHINGTON DC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000789

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: A LITTLE FOOD AID GOES A LONG WAY IN TAJIKISTAN'S RASHT VALLEY

REF: DUSHANBE 0176

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11. SUMMARY: In a place where a covered pit latrine is considered a sanitary leap forward, USAID's Food for Peace/Development Assistance Program (DAP) provides more than 3,800 poor families in Tajikistan's isolated Rasht valley with supplemental food, and nutrition and hygiene education. Throughout Tajikistan, an estimated 392,000 people could benefit from improved diet and health if the DAP program runs its course to 2009. Although the food aid program is slated to be phased out two years early, post requests USAID consider finding additional developmental support for education and health programs in these remote areas. END SUMMARY.

12. During an April 27 distribution of Title II Food for Peace supplies in a remote side valley off the main Rasht Valley of Garm District, PolOff spoke with women as they picked up their supplemental flour, oil, and lentils. Asked what they had learned through the Mercy Corps education program required of all beneficiaries, they quickly listed off the need to cover latrines (with a few noting the importance of even using latrines vice the great outdoors); the use of soap for washing hands, dishes and clothes; and the need for pregnant women to eat additional nutritious foods. They spontaneously applauded PolOff's introduction as a representative of the U.S. Embassy, thanking the people of the United States for their care and generosity.

13. Many of the women are single heads of households due to widespread unemployment and the fact that the majority of men over age 17 work in Russia as migrant laborers. They average four to five children each. The valley is entirely agricultural, growing mainly potatoes, with some domestic fruit trees. Electricity is sporadic-a few hours in the morning and evening, and women rely on firewood from the rapidly dwindling mountain brush to heat their homes and cook. The additional

oil, flour, and lentils provide the poorest families-those with pregnant women, children under two years old, and children with disabilities-an added bit of food security for the difficult winter and the spring planting season.

¶4. In Rasht, Mercy Corps employs 45 program and operational staff to reach the most remote areas of Garm district. The program goes beyond food distribution to help supplement the lack of education and health resources. On a national level, Mercy Corps works together with CARE, Counterpart International, and Save the Children USA to form the Food Aid Consortium for Tajikistan (FACT). The original 2004-2009 plan would increase food security so that rural poor had better access to minimally sufficient food, health care services, and education, while addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity: non-availability of nutritional food, limited economic access to food, and less than optimal utilization of available food. The DAP program is not just humanitarian, but also focuses on development. FACT partners use tactics such as Food for Work and Food for Education where employees and students are rewarded through food rations.

¶5. In Rasht's most isolated mountain communities, the DAP meets critical needs in a region that lags further and further behind other parts of Tajikistan. Rasht has not benefited from recent economic growth or foreign investment (septel). When the United States ceases food assistance in 2007, Mercy Corps' Garm director doubted another donor would fill the gap.

¶6. COMMENT: The DAP is one development program that has truly won the hearts and minds of Tajikistan's poorest (and most Islamic). Post struggles every day to convince the Tajik people that the United States is a reliable ally and consistent friend. Continuing the program through its original end date would go a long way to demonstrate that our money and rhetoric are in the same place. Although these communities may not be on the brink of starvation, they certainly need additional assistance to

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raise their standard of health and living to minimally acceptable levels. We understand that policy is moving away from food aid, but hope there would be some sort of supplemental funding to maintain these critical programs without taking from the already stretched USAID country budget. END COMMENT.

SIGNATURE
HOAGLAND